



A Guidance Note on Historic Environment Champions



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Local authorities are essential to the protection and management of England's historic environment. The appointment of a Member or Senior Officer as a Historic Environment Champion will enable them to fulfil this role more effectively and ensure that the historic environment makes its full contribution to the economic and social wellbeing of the local community.

Local Authority Historic Environment Champions will

- Help unlock the untapped potential of the local historic environment
- Provide leadership for heritage issues within the authority
- Join up policy between departments across the local authority and ensure the historic environment is taken into account in the development of all the authority's policies and forward strategies
- Develop a close working relationship with the Design Champion, ensuring that the Authority has a seamless and coherent approach to the built and historic environment
- Identify opportunities for the Authority to use the historic environment in the pursuit of its wider corporate objectives

INTRODUCTION

Local authorities play a fundamental role in caring for and managing England's historic environment. They own and manage historic assets and grant-aid the restoration of historic buildings and areas. They are central to the management of change to the historic environment in their roles as planning authorities and as initiators and partners in regeneration projects.

The historic environment offers many opportunities for local authorities to enhance the quality of life for everybody across their communities, yet many of these opportunities are overlooked. The historic environment is instead too often regarded as a hurdle to be overcome before a local authority can achieve its objectives, rather than a tool that can help it realise them.

CASE STUDY – VALE ROYAL BOROUGH COUNCIL, CHESHIRE

Vale Royal Borough Council has already adopted the Champions concept, with Councillor Mark Stocks being nominated as the elected Member who acts as Historic Environment Champion for the Council. Councillor Stocks is ideally placed to make the most of this position, as he is also the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport, the brief for which covers many areas of relevance to the historic environment. In his Historic Environment Champion role, Councillor Stocks is supported by John Jeffrey (the Director of Environment & Sustainability) and David Hayes (the borough's Conservation & Design Manager). The three hold regular face to face briefings to discuss historic environment issues as they relate to both Councillor Stocks' portfolio and to the Council's policy direction as a whole, in addition to maintaining regular email contact.

This 'historic environment team' at Vale Royal Borough Council appears to work very well. The day to day involvement of John Jeffrey and David Hayes in providing Council services means that the two are quickly aware of issues that arise for staff and service users. John Jeffrey is also a member of the Council's Management Team, and as such is involved in the implementation of strategic policy decisions. Councillor Stocks' position as Champion and portfolio holder provides leadership for historic environment issues and enables 'joining-up', ensuring that departments that deal with cross cutting issues such as regeneration and transport will also be aware of relevant developments.

A Councillor Peter Metcalfe,
Historic Environment Champion,
Bath & North East Somerset
Council. © English Heritage.
Photographer James O. Davies.

B Anderton boat lift, Northwich,
Cheshire © English Heritage.
Photographer James O. Davies.

The Government and English Heritage are committed to both helping local authorities identify ways in which the historic environment can make a contribution to their social and economic goals, and to working with them to ensure that this approach fits within their wider set of activities. But to unlock the potential of the historic environment, championing and leadership at the local level are required.

The Government is urging all local authorities in England to appoint a Historic Environment Champion at Member or Senior Officer level. This note not only seeks to give further detail as to how these Champions can ensure that the historic environment plays a key role in all the Council's activities, but also the potential benefits if they are successful.

HOW WILL IT WORK?

We are looking for elected members (ideally cabinet portfolio holders) or senior officers to take on the role of Champion, and a 'role description' is detailed elsewhere on this leaflet. This is not meant to be prescriptive, but has been drawn up with help from existing Champions and a range of local authorities facing a variety of historic environment issues. We realise that there are many different models of management structures across English local authorities, together with differing functions, responsibilities and local circumstances. All of this will mean that the role of Historic Environment Champions will vary between authorities.

Not every authority will be in a position to establish an arrangement such as that at Vale Royal BC. Some authorities may wish to appoint a 'backbench' councillor to be their Historic Environment Champion, while others may consider it more appropriate for a member of an overview or scrutiny committee to take on the role.



The key point is to establish integrated corporate thinking – seeing the heritage potential in the education, highways, parks and planning policies of the Council – and to ensure that the historic environment is taken fully into account in the development of plans and strategies of the Authority and its partner bodies, including Local Strategic Partnerships.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT – LOCAL MANAGEMENT (HELM)

This guidance note is also part of a wider English Heritage project. The HELM project was launched by English Heritage in March 2004 and is aimed at both local authority Members and officers. It is a training project designed to improve planning, land management, economic and social development decisions relating to the historic environment. The training is being delivered by distance learning, training seminars, courses and a suite of guidance papers (of which this is one) accessible via CD-Rom and at www.helm.org.uk and further information on the HELM project is also available via email at info@helm.org.uk.

THE BENEFITS

Perhaps the most obvious example of the tangible benefits that an emphasis on the historic environment can bring is in regeneration terms. In the Grainger Town area of Newcastle-upon-Tyne a partnership between Newcastle City Council, English Partnerships and English Heritage was established in 1997 to focus on heritage-led regeneration for this historic quarter. The project was completed in 2003 having accomplished and exceeded all its objectives, and with around £40m of public sector investment having levered in another £ 160m of private sector investment. The result is a flourishing residential and retail community.

Tourism presents another opportunity for the historic environment to bring economic benefits to local communities. For example, the refurbished Anderton Boat Lift in Vale Royal has restored a navigable link between the Trent & Mersey Canal and the River Weaver. It is estimated that the extra boat trips and visitors generated by the restored lift will mean an extra £ 1. 1m spent annually in the area.

There are many other examples such as these where local authorities can put the historic environment to use in the pursuit of their social and economic objectives. The appointment of a Historic Environment Champion will provide leadership in this area and ensure that the historic environment is integrated with all the authority's services and policies.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT AND DESIGN CHAMPIONS

Many local authorities have already appointed Design Champions, either at Senior Officer or at Member level. The role of a Design Champion is to ensure that design issues are taken into account at each stage of the decision making process within the local authority. This initiative is being taken forward by CABE. There is a close relationship between the roles of Design and Historic Environment Champions. The two will be complementary for much of the time, although there will be areas that are unique to one or the other. While there are differences between the two roles, we do not believe they are such that they could not be undertaken by the same individual, and advice from CABE and English Heritage will ensure that any obstacles can be overcome.

Further details, advice and information regarding the role and responsibilities of Design Champions is available from CABE (enquiries@cabe.org.uk, tel 020 7960 2400 or www.cabe.org.uk).

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F Flag Fen, Norfolk. © English
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G Hackney Town Hall. © English
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Brennan.

H The People's Park, Halifax.
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So you've been appointed your local authority's Historic Environment Champion. What do you do next?

- Make contact with English Heritage. We can put you in touch with one of our nine regional offices around the country who will be able to offer advice on how we can work with your Authority.
- Familiarise yourself with the material that is currently available. In addition to the role description for Champions, English Heritage can point you in the direction of other helpful background information.
- Research what kind of training and development opportunities are available. In addition to English Heritage's HELM project, other organisations offer training courses in related areas, such as CABE.
- Seek to foster working relationships with senior officers within the Authority, particularly those in related departments such as planning, environment, highways and regeneration.
- Establish whether or not your Authority has a Design Champion. If it has, you should organise regular liaison meetings and include relevant senior officers.

CONCLUSION

We believe that appointing a Historic Environment Champion can lead to significant benefits for a local authority and its community. A Champion can provide leadership and a symbol of commitment on the part of the Authority, and can join up policy and strategy across departments. Such a greater degree of focus on the historic environment can deliver real benefits for everybody.

“The Government... urges authorities to appoint champions for the historic environment within their management structures.”

The Historic Environment: A Force For Our Future, DCMS, 200 1.

Historic Environment Champions have already been appointed in a range of local authorities, from cities such as Bath and Liverpool to shire districts such as Oswestry and Vale Royal. But the historic environment in every local authority deserves a Champion – we hope that you agree with us that it is important enough to play a central role in everything your Authority does.

For further information on Historic Environment Champions, please contact English Heritage on 020 7973 3279 or via email – champions@english-heritage.org.uk.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT CHAMPION ROLE DESCRIPTION

The role of the Historic Environment Champion is to persuade both colleagues in the local authority and the wider community that the historic environment offers many opportunities to improve the quality of life for everyone. The Champion will therefore ensure that the historic environment plays a key role in the activities of the local authority in terms of policy development and service delivery, and that both Members and officers of the Council are able to make decisions fully informed of both the opportunities and implications for the historic environment.

The Champion will:

- Ensure that Cabinet portfolio holders and senior officers (including the Chief Executive) are aware of historic environment issues and opportunities as they relate to their service
- Promote the value of the historic environment as a catalyst for urban and rural regeneration and neighbourhood renewal
- Be alert to the opportunities for the historic environment to attract inward economic investment and funding

- Ensure that relevant historic environment issues are taken into account in the preparation of all relevant corporate strategies and local development frameworks, including Community Strategies prepared by Local Strategic Partnerships
- Ensure that the provision of historic environment expertise is adequately resourced to enable the continuity and quality of service to be maintained
- Work with officers in the planning service to ensure that new development in historic areas responds creatively and sympathetically to its environment and ensure quality assurance, compliance and enforcement where necessary
- Ensure that the Authority's key policies, such as education, highways management, tourism and leisure take proper account of the local and regional historic environment
- Work with officers and colleagues in the Authority to develop a Conservation Management Statement or Strategy
- Ensure that good practice within the Authority relating to heritage and the historic environment is shared, and that examples of such practice from other authorities are brought to the attention of the relevant Members or officers
- Work closely with corporate property officers and other colleagues and Members to ensure a positive and long-term strategic approach to the management and conservation of the Authority's own historic estate, and to ensure that it is appropriately identified and recorded
- Ensure that all relevant colleagues within the Authority (both elected Members and officers) are aware of the available external expertise and advice on the historic environment available from bodies such as English Heritage and the national statutory amenity societies.

